

### Behaviour of *Quelea quelea* during an invasion of the species in Turkana, north-west Kenya

In the last week of July 1987 I noticed vast numbers of Red-billed Queleas *Quelea quelea* in the plains of north-western Turkana District between Lokudule and Nanam (c. 4°18'N, 34°41'E). After modest rains in April and May the area was covered with dry yellow grasses; there was no human cultivation of sorghum or millet in the area. Most birds seen were either immature or adults in non-breeding plumage and very few individuals in breeding plumage were observed. Many old nests were seen in small isolated shrubs or in thickets along dry luggas.

During the first few days of August the birds started moving westwards. At first only isolated flocks of 50–100 quelea arrived in Lokichoggio, but after two or three days the vicinity of every conceivable water source was 'covered' with the birds. Natural rock pools in the Mogila and Songot Mountains were full of drowned birds.

The birds behaved in a strange tame and suicidal manner. In the AMREF staff houses at Lopading all doors had to be shut for several days to keep out the birds. A small entrance at ground level for use by the resident cat also had to be closed. Nevertheless, birds still managed to get into the buildings and several drowned while attempting to drink out of the WC. At the peak, an estimated 5000–10000 birds were within the AMREF compound (c. 1 ha).

The quelea lined branches and even small twigs in the compound near places where we were watering plants, and masses were killed for food by the Turkana people by simply hitting them with sticks as they sat in the bushes. In the evenings the birds left the compound, probably to roost in large trees outside, but they returned in the mornings. The numbers reduced after the first week of August and by 15th not a single quelea was to be seen in the area.

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### House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* in Somalia

Apropos the account of the discovery of a hybrid sparrow *Passer domesticus* × *castanopterus* in Somalia in 1980 (Ash & Colston 1981) it is of interest to report the presence of a group of House Sparrows *P. domesticus* found by JEM in the port of Mogadishu (2°03'N, 45°21'E), Somalia. They were found on 13 January 1982, when a male and two females were seen examining some holes in a concrete structure in the port. Much time had been spent in this area during the previous several days when there had been no sign of the birds. JSA visited the site on 15 January and the detailed plumage descriptions obtained in good light at a range of a few metres indicated that the male agreed with the Indian subspecies *P.d. indicus*.

There was no suggestion in either sex that hybridization with the Somali Sparrow *P. castanopterus* may have been involved. In the male the grey of the head extended from the base of the bill to the hind crown, but the nape and hind-neck were chestnut, forming a half-collar reaching to the ear coverts. The bill and